



Mid-Hudson Astronomical Association

May, 2013

Website: www.midhudsonastro.org

Yahoo Group: MHAstro

President : Willie Yee

Secretary: Jim Rockrohr

Newsletter Editor: Rick Versace

Publicity: Paul Chauvet

Parks Liaison:

Vice President: Joe Macagne

Treasurer: Ken Bailey

Membership Coordinator: Caryn Sobel

Webmaster: Sean Dague

College Liaison: Dr. Amy Forestell

Directors: Steve Carey, Dave Lindemann, Karl Loatman, & Tom Rankin

Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the monthly meeting of the Mid Hudson Astronomical Association, April 16, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by President Willie Yee in the auditorium of the Coykendall Science Building at SUNY, New Paltz, NY. There were approximately 30 people in attendance at the beginning of the meeting. 3 visitors introduced themselves.

The minutes of the previous meeting had not yet been published, so acceptance of the minutes of the March 19th meeting was deferred to next month.

Officer's Reports:

Membership:

Caryn Sobel reported that there are 28 paid memberships, 4 life members, and 10 advocates for 2013, so far. She reported that she has sent a reminder email to all 2012 members that have not yet renewed.

Treasurer:

Ken Bailey gave his report. There is a current balance of \$2786.71.

Treasurer's Report for the month of April

Date: 19 May, 2013

Bank Balance:	\$2669.95
Outstanding Checks:	\$ 281.36
Outstanding Deposits:	\$ 50.00
Ending Bank Balance:	\$2438.59

Checkbook Balance:	\$2438.59
Balance with Bank: Yes	

Outstanding checks since end of month:	\$281.36
Outstanding deposits since end of month:	\$356.00
Ending balance total:	\$2744.59
Notes: None.	

Respectfully submitted: Ken Bailey
Treasurer

Outreach:

Upcoming events include:

- NEAF (Northeast Astronomy Forum) at Rockland Community College April 20 and 21.
- Beltane festival at Stone Mountain Farm on April 27. Willie and other club members will be doing a solar presentation as well as evening viewing of Saturn, etc.
- Earth Day on April 28. Willie will be doing solar viewing at the Huegenot Church in New Paltz.
- To support these solar viewing events, a motion was made and seconded to spend \$270 to buy 1000 solar glasses. The motion passed with no objections. It was suggested that we make labels with our logo or club name and put them on the glasses. Ken will get the blank labels, Paul C. will print them. A group will be organized to apply them to the glasses.
- There will be an MHAA presence at the Grey Fox music festival again this year, July 18-21. Paul Granich reported that 6 or 7 people have already signed up to help. He is looking for more help, especially to work the information booth during the day. Watch Yahoo and MeetUp for details.
- Willie was interviewed on WGXC community radio. There are opportunities to produce astronomy related shows for WGXC if anyone is interested in pursuing this.

Publicity:

Paul Chauvet reported that he will be promoting the next few months' speakers.

Webmaster:

Sean Dague was not present.

Upcoming programs:

Joe M. reported that the May meeting's speaker will be Steven Ballavia who will be discussing the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope. Amy Forestall will be speaking at the June meeting, and Chris Kendall at the July meeting.

Old Business:

Beginners Workshops:

Joe Macagne is looking to organize a small group to plan and execute a series of workshops on how to get started in the astronomy hobby and to help beginners. See him if you would like to help. Joe will be coordinating these with the SUNY planetarium presentation schedules.

Video Library:

Ken Bailey reported no new progress due to work commitments. He hopes to have it in good shape next month.

12" Club Telescope:

There was a discussion about the state of the club's 12" dobsonian telescope. The club needs to review the evaluation done by Rudy Leon and decide how to proceed to either fix it or get rid of it.

Other Club telescopes:

Paul Chavet has the 4" and is using it. There is a 10" home built Dobsonian available to be donated to the club if the club is interested. There is also a 6" Dynascope available on Long Island.

Walkway Solar System Model:

Willie has not started anything on this project, yet.

New Business:

Steve Carey requested \$67.10 to reimburse him for the prizes awarded at the Dutchess County Science Fair. A motion was made, seconded and passed with no objection. Two prizes were awarded this year; one that measured lunar crater depths using shadow length, and another that investigated growing plants in zero gravity.

Observing Reports:

- The Olana walk on April 14th was attended by about 40 people. They had clear skies. It was well received.
- The solar viewing at the Rondout Science Fair went well. Willie reported he had 60-70 people stop and view the sun.
- The star party at Haviland School was a little cloudy, but they observed an ISS pass.
- About 6 people reported successfully viewing comet PANSTARRS.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 PM.

The program that followed was a talk by Bob Berman. (Attendance at the beginning of his talk was about 62 people.)

Submitted by James Rockrohr, May 19, 2013.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The Texas Star Party 2013

By Willie Yee

This was my first Texas Star Party. I went mainly on the recommendation of my long-lost brother David, who said it had the darkest skies he had ever seen. I left on April 30th, and overnighted with relatives and friends in Pittsburgh, Columbus OH, Champaign IL, and Dallas TX, with a stop off in Missouri to drop off the base of my Coulter which I had taken the mirror out of for my Teeter. They wanted it for their club loaner scope. I also stopped off for lunch at my alma mater, Olney Friends School, and since it was a sunny day, set up my solar scopes for the AP Physics class. The teacher was the most excited, practically jumping up and down at being able to see the details on the sun.



Arriving on Sunday May 5, I moved into the bunkhouse where I was staying. One of my bunkmates was Bill Bogardus of AOS. Another was a crusty old chain-smoking wizened Texan who has spent most of his life in law enforcement, and had plenty of stories to tell.

The food (lunch and dinner) was plentiful and pretty good, served cafeteria style, with a large salad bar. There was a red-light cafe that had drinks and snacks, including pulled pork BBQ. I set up my scope on the middle observing field, fairly close to the bunk, and it turned out I was right next to Dave Cotterell, whom I knew from AAR and WSP. On my other side was Dave Mitsky who does the monthly Celestial Calendar on Cloudy Nights. His friend had a 25" Dob set up, which I got to see a few mind-boggling things through.

Scott Ewart attended, on his own, not as at TeleVue employee, but he was located on the upper observing field, a bit away from me.

During the day I took side trips to the Macdonald Observatory, where I got to see the 107" and the 10 meter Hobby-Eberly telescope, Ft. Davis, where the Buffalo Soldiers were stationed, and the Museum of the Big Bend, where they had an impressive map collection, including the first maps of the "American" continent.



One evening I went out to the town of Marfa, where some strange and unexplained lights have appeared across the desert for over 100 years. I did not see them, but plenty of folks have, including my Texas bunkmate.

We had a couple short bursts of weather during the days, mostly wind, with dust devils that knocked over some dobs and sent lawn chairs flying, and a couple of brief but intense downpours that resulted in a mad scramble in the vendors' hut as they tried to get everything off the floor when the water came pouring through. Temperatures were generally pleasant, in the mid-80's, and very dry. A couple of nights were a bit chilly, in the low 40s.



Observing conditions varied. We had two terrific nights, three variable nights, and two clouded out. On the good nights I got the best view of the Milky Way I have ever seen. The dark lanes were sharply defined, many different densities were visible in the star clouds, and the MW even cast shadows. I also got to see zodiacal light for the first time.

I spent most of my time working my way through one of the several observing lists that the Texas Star Party provides. This one was titled "I Have No Idea Where I Am," which was appropriated during the times my Argo Navis computer was not working. I found the Night Sky Observer's Guide absolutely essential for finding these lesser known objects.

My favorites were Kemble 2 ("mini-Casseopeia"), and a globular cluster NGC 6144, which looked like someone had taken a hatchet to a glob. The most consistently difficult objects for me were the

planetary nebulae. On Thursday, the forecast looked like we would be socked in with clouds for the remaining three days. I was despairing that I would not be able to finish my observing list. However the sky opened up on Friday night with a Texas-sized sucker hole, which got better and darker as the night went on. The sky looked as good as it did on Tuesday, and actually measured darker (21.95 vs. 21.78 on my SQM-L meter), but the seeing was still not great, and the transparency was slightly less, probably due to the rain earlier in the day. I did finish the last two required items on my list, and one for good measure. At that point, I wondered what I should look at next. I looked up into the dark sky, packed up the telescope, and sat for half an hour staring at the Milky Way.



Triple Treat

By Dr. Ethan Siegel

The solar system is a busy place, with five wandering planets visible to the naked eye alone. When any two pass close by each other from our point of view, we see an astronomical *conjunction*, but on very rare occasions, three planets will find themselves grouped together: a *triple* conjunction. Towards the end of May, Mercury, Venus and Jupiter will treat us to the best triple conjunction in years.

On May 25th, Mercury will pass within 1.4° of Venus, then two days later Mercury comes within 2.4° of Jupiter, and finally on the 28th, Jupiter and Venus approach within 1° of one another. If it weren't for the slight orbital tilt of our solar system's planetary orbits, these conjunctions would all be *occultations* instead. During the nights of May 26th-27th, all three planets are visible immediately after sunset within the same 3° field of view, with the triple conjunction peaking in a triangular shape on the 26th. (For scale, the full Moon subtends about $1/2^\circ$.) The three planets appear close together for a few days more, making a line in the sky on the 30th/31st.

How does this happen? Mercury and Venus race around the Sun far faster than Earth, with Mercury completing more than four



revolutions around the Sun for each one that Earth makes. At the same time, Jupiter is far slower, taking 12 years to orbit just once around the Sun. Jupiter's been high in the sky during the early parts of the night, but steadily lowers throughout May as Earth continues to move away from it, approaching its maximum distance from Earth. Mercury and Venus, meanwhile, begin to move out from behind the Sun during May: Venus at the beginning of the month and Mercury in the middle.

Thus, during this triple conjunction, *all three* planets will be on the far side of the Sun, something that happens just 25% of the time in triple conjunctions involving Mercury and Venus! If you telescopically resolve these planets into disks, you'll see our inner

worlds in a nearly-full gibbous phase. Jupiter will appear largest in terms of angular diameter, followed by Venus and lastly by Mercury. Just a year ago, during its now-famous transit, Venus took up more than a full arc-minute in the sky; during this conjunction, it will just *one-sixth* that angular size and less than a third the apparent diameter of Jupiter. Nevertheless, Venus will still be more than **six times** as bright as Jupiter during this time, outshining all night-sky objects other than the Moon. Closer conjunctions of two naked-eye planets are frequent, but getting three or more like this happens just once or twice per decade, so don't miss your chance to see it.

And speaking of occultations, The Space Place has a great kid-friendly explanation of the Venus transit and solar eclipses of 2012 at spaceplace.nasa.gov/venus-transit.

Dr. Ethan Siegel, a theoretical astrophysicist, is a professor at the University of Portland (OR) and Lewis & Clark College.

Upcoming Speakers for 2013

May

Steve Bellavia - The LSST Camera: The heart and soul of the next generation survey telescope

TBA

Sue French – A few of My Favorite Things

Directions To The Star Party Site—

[Lake Taghkanic State Park](#) is in the town Ancram, NY. The park entrance is on the Taconic Parkway 10 minutes north of the exit used for Wilcox park.

Star Parties at Lake Taghkanic are held in the West Parking lot, next to the beach. The skies are darker than in Wilcox, with less stray light to deal with. The horizon is also much lower, especially to the south and east, making many more targets possible.

IMPORTANT: all events at Lake Taghkanic State Park require an **RSVP** which includes license plate number of the car you are bringing (please do so via [Meetup](#)). The park is patrolled by state police, and all non registered cars will be ticketed and risk our use of the park.

General Information:

- ♦ For the foreseeable future, all indoor meetings will be held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month in Coykendall Science Bldg., SUNY New Paltz (directions above) at 7:30 PM. All indoor events are FREE! All are welcome. The presentations are generally geared towards teenagers and up. For more information, call the Club Hotline.
- ♦ Dates listed for star parties are the primary dates. The rain date is the following night unless otherwise noted. Only one session is held for a given weekend, usually on the primary date, Friday, unless postponed (usually due to inclement weather) to the backup date, Saturday. Exceptions to this are noted in the “Scheduled Events” section above. Call the Club Hotline for updated information. Everyone should meet at the gate at the scheduled time. The gate will be closed after that time.
- ♦ All outdoor events are FREE! All are welcome. If you bring small children, it is **your** responsibility to keep a close eye on them. Please do not bring white-light flashlights. Instead, bring a red astronomer’s flashlight or an ordinary flashlight covered with several layers of red cellophane. If in doubt about the weather, check the status of the event at www.midhudsonastro.org.